Another gas station adds ethanol

Corn-based fuel gaining more attention among drivers

Bob Moser
bmoser@theadvertiser.com

Louisiana’s second E85 pump opened last month at a fuel station in Baton Rouge, selling corn-based ethanol from out of state and building interest among motorists.

Three more stations in the state capital are preparing to sell ethanol in the coming months, and in-state production could start this fall in Lacassine.

The E85 option at Sullivan Oil Co., at 4637 Florida Blvd., is aptly situated between state and city-parish offices downtown and the state’s Department of Agriculture and Forestry office, all of which have ethanol-ready vehicles.

In a month’s time, Sullivan had sold a few thousand gallons of E85, and that was before publicity started two weeks ago for the station, said Ann Virgets, spokeswoman for Sullivan Oil.

Louisiana’s first E85 pump opened in Sulphur in July at Pumpelly Oil Company. Both offer a drop in the bucket of potential demand from the 120,000 flex-fuel vehicles in the state, now considered an outdated estimate by the U.S. Department of Energy from a few years ago.

Priced at $2.89 a gallon on Friday, E85 is less expensive than gasoline but offers less fuel efficiency, typically resulting in a 15 percent to 30 percent drop in miles per gallon for the driver. The better fuel economy your vehicle gets now, the smaller ethanol’s price margin needs to be for you to save.

Incentives are that it’s a cleaner-burning, homegrown fuel that packs more energy, helping engines perform better (the Indy Racing League adopted 100 percent ethanol as its fuel of choice last year).

The cost incurred by a fuel station installing an E85 pump can range from a few thousand dollars to tens of thousands, depending on if they must install a new underground tank.

Sullivan Oil was able to clean out a premium gas tank underground to use for E85.

State and federal tax incentives let fuel stations recover at least 30 percent of the installation costs during tax time next year. “We probably would have done it without the federal tax credit,” Virgets said.

“It’s just something we thought was right thing to do.”

— Ann Virgets, spokeswoman for Sullivan Oil

A fuel provider in Ferriday may soon install E85 pumps in Ferriday and Tallulah, said Tammy Morgan, sustainability and renewable energy coordinator for the Baton Rouge Department of Public Works. She hasn’t heard of any plans for E85 pumps at Lafayette stations yet.

Both the Sulphur and Baton Rouge stations get their ethanol and E85 pump equipment from CleanFuel USA, a Texas-based distributor with a new satellite office in Lake Charles.

Virgets said she looks forward to sugar cane-based ethanol being made at Louisiana GreenFuels, the nation’s first cane-to-ethanol facility expected to start producing this fall in Lacassine.

Transporting corn-based ethanol in from out of state is getting more costly each month, and Virgets will raise her E85 price to $3.08 next week.

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